

# Service for Learning and Life and Every Student a Graduate



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## Tips for Motivating and Engaging Students

*How can tutors awaken the love of learning in each student?*

AmeriCorps members participating in a brief, online survey during an Oct. 27 DPI Webinar indicated that one of their greatest challenges is motivating students. Following, are a collection of ideas to help make tutoring sessions positive and learning-centered. Generally, students will show some self-motivation if they (1) know what is expected of them, (2) think the effort is worthwhile, and (3) feel they will benefit through effective performance.

**Make it real.** Create learning activities based on topics relevant to students' lives. Use local examples, teach with events in the news, use pop culture technology, or connecting the subject with your students' culture, outside interests or social lives.

**Provide choices.** Student motivation increases when they feel some sense of autonomy in the learning process, and declines when students have no voice in the class structure. Give students options such as selecting from alternate assignments, stories, or what subject to study next.

**Be supportive.** Listen carefully to students, giving hints and encouragement, being responsive to student questions and showing empathy for students. Greet students by name and use plain expressions of correction without emotion, such as: "Yes, that's right;" "Okay;" "Yes, that's just what I wanted;" "Correct;" Or, "No, the correct answer is \_\_\_\_;" "You had the first part right, but the last part was incorrect;" and "Thank you for taking a risk to answer that, even though it was the wrong answer."

**Create challenges students can master.** Give students incremental challenges. Ask the student who doesn't do homework to do one problem and be prepared to tell you how she did it. Some students who lack motivation have been so accustomed to thinking that they can't be successful, that they have to be given small opportunities to "reawaken" them to the fact that they can be successful.

**Strategize with struggling students.** When students are struggling with poor academic performance, low self-confidence or low motivation, they may need to know *how* to learn. Teach them specific strategies to complete an assignment, take notes or review for a test. For example, help students study nonfiction text by having them write down emphasized words on a separate sheet of paper that can serve as a study guide. Or, help students determine what information they will need to study for quizzes or tests and practice answering anticipated questions with them.

**Review what the student accomplished.** At the end of each tutoring session, allow time to discuss what was learned, and what skills and activities require more practice. What short-term goals did you achieve together? How does this get the student closer to long-term goals?



### Resources for Tutors to Motivate Students



For "do's and don'ts" in working with elementary and middle school students, view the St. Paul Public Schools Foundation Tutor Training Resources: <http://sppsfoundation.org/tutor-training-resources>.



Tutoring and Out-of-School Time Strategies: <http://educationnorthwest.org/service/586>



SEDL After-School Training Toolkit: [http://www.sedl.org/afterschool/toolkits/homework/pr\\_study\\_skills.html](http://www.sedl.org/afterschool/toolkits/homework/pr_study_skills.html)



The Read Write Now Partners Tutoring Program: <http://www.udel.edu/ETL/RWN/Tutorman.html>



Web-Based Tutor Training from the Corporation for National and Community Service and LEARNS Project: <http://learning.nationalserviceresources.org/learns/web-based/>

# "Beauregard's Big Word" a Big Hit!

*AmeriCorps member Sharon Schmidt serves in Grantsburg*

First through Third Graders at Grantsburg Elementary School can give hugs and earn stickers while expanding their vocabulary. AmeriCorps member Sharon Schmidt came up with an idea to make learning new words more fun, and so far, nearly 40% of the school's 143 students have participated. Stuffed dog, Beauregard, and his squeezable sister, Beulah, entice children into Sharon's AmeriCorps room every week to learn a new "big" word.

While Beauregard adorns the wall, Beulah sits on a nearby counter and is available for hugging anytime. Both wear Grantsburg baseball caps Sharon found in her office and Beauregard sports a paper backpack, making him look like a cuddly canine student.



**Sharon Schmidt with Beauregard and Beulah**

The word of the week is posted on a wall and students can stop in as many times as they want to take a stab at correctly pronouncing it, defining it, and using it in a sentence. Students who get all three right earn a small reward – a sticker or an eraser. Students also sign their names on a chalkboard when they have completed all three parts of the challenge, something they thought of as a way to motivate themselves and other students.

Sharon chooses high-frequency "power words" featured on state standardized tests. "The draw is the challenge," Sharon said. "I do a lot of 20-second teaching with kids. Once they get the word, they feel really great. They've achieved success and are on the path."

She also prompts students unfamiliar with the words about where they'll find information: a dictionary, online, a glossary, or as one student suggested, the "dinosaur" (thesaurus). It's OK with Sharon if they also use other people as a resource, but she always cautions them to ask, "Are you confident that's the correct answer?" Parents have laughingly told Sharon that their children have asked them if they're sure that they're right. Other parents have been impressed that their children have used the new "big" words at home, and some teachers have commented that children's spelling has improved.

The "Big Word" challenge works, she said, because every child has a chance to participate and succeed. "It puts them on an even playing field. There's no limit to the number of times that they can be wrong. I remind them not to give up, but if the word is just too hard for them, they know that a new word comes on Mondays," she added. Students can stop by in her room before and after school and during recess to complete the challenge.

Sharon has publicized the challenge by e-mailing an announcement to teachers and posting information about it on the school website and in the school and district newsletters. She tutors some, but not all, of the children who participate.

The challenge has resulted in other benefits. "It's been really nice to see the 3<sup>rd</sup> graders encouraging the 1<sup>st</sup> graders. The older kids are very proud of the younger ones," Sharon remarked. "No one who has tried this challenge has been discouraged. We emphasize that everyone has to learn the same skills. They've all been encouraged by the process and by each other."



**Dec. 23:** Progress Reports are due.

**You're Invited:** On Monday, Nov. 14, at 10:30 a.m., DPI will offer a 90-minute Webinar on volunteer management for DPI VISTA members. DPI AmeriCorps members are also invited to participate. Please call Laura Paella to register.

**Missed our last Webinar?** A recording of the Oct. 27 Webinar DPI hosted for AmeriCorps members is located at [https://www.livemeeting.com/cc/wi\\_dpi/view](https://www.livemeeting.com/cc/wi_dpi/view). The Recording ID is ND5W28.

The Webinar PowerPoint is also on the Google Site on the Resources [page](#) under "webinars."



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